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# Olympian Sponsorship Roles: Sports Identification, Credibility, and Intent to Purchase

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OLYMPIAN SPONSORSHIP ROLES: SPORTS IDENTIFICATION, CREDIBILITY,  
AND INTENT TO PURCHASE

Amy A. Rothblum

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This thesis investigates whether Olympian athletes make for high-quality sponsors in advertising strategies and campaign efforts. The research focuses on social cognitive theory, specifically the role of identification to determine if strong identification and celebrity credibility can lead customers to intent to purchase. The results demonstrate that there is a positive correlation between the team identification and sports fans identification and the perceived credibility of the famous Olympian and the lesser known Olympian. There was also a significant correlation between team identification and intent to purchase with the lesser known Olympian, but not with any other condition or variable.

OLYMPIAN SPONSORSHIP ROLES: SPORTS IDENTIFICATION, CREDIBILITY,  
AND INTENT TO PURCHASE

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Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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2014

OLYMPIAN SPONSORSHIP ROLES: SPORTS IDENTIFICATION, CREDIBILITY,  
AND INTENT TO PURCHASE

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A.A.R.

## CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
CONTENTS	ii
TABLES	iv
CHAPTER	
I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	1
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	7
Olympics	7
Olympic Media Coverage	11
Advertising	13
Theoretical Perspective: Social Cognitive Theory	19
Identification	22
Hypotheses	25
Summary	26
III. METHOD	28
Participants	28
Data Collection	29
Survey	29
Procedure	33
Data Analysis	33
Summary	35
IV. RESULTS	36

Summary Findings	36
Hypotheses	37
Summary	42
V. DISCUSSION	43
Famous Olympian	44
American Olympian Team	46
Condition Differences	49
Limitations	51
Future Research and Practical Implications	52
Summary and Conclusion	54
REFERENCES	56

## TABLES

Table	Page
1. Means and Standard Deviations for Three Conditions and Variables	37
2. Correlations for All Conditions	38
3. Correlations for Condition One (Famous Olympian)	38
4. Correlations for Condition Two (U.S. Olympian)	39
5. Correlations for Condition Three (Unknown Athlete)	40
6. ANOVA Based on Advertising Condition Viewed	40
7. Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons Means Differences	41
8. ANCOVA of the Advertisement's Influence on Intent to Purchase Controlling for Credibility, "Fan," and Team Identification	42



## CHAPTER I

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

For thousands of years individuals have been competing, and throughout the last century, a major venue of competition has been the Olympic Games; the only sporting event that links the ancient world and the modern world. The Games have been a spectacle for audiences to observe inspired athletes overcome extraordinary challenges and hardships to be recognized as champions. These events have been designed to test the human ability to see how individuals can push their limits to the extreme to prove themselves as the best. The modern Summer and Winter Games are held every four years, with the schedule alternating so that there are Games of some sort every two years. For example, in 2008 and 2012 the Summer Olympics took place, and in 2006 and 2010 the Winter Olympics took place; therefore, every two years the Games occur, but every four years the seasons repeat. These sporting events provide audiences with the opportunity to socialize and come together to celebrate a dramatic and usually unpredictable Game. The Olympics provide this opportunity on an international level, bringing globalization and education worldwide.

The athletes that are represented in these events become internationally recognized even upon entering the Games. Today, television further stimulates spectators, as media makers televise athlete profiles to “keep the attention of their home television viewing audience and, hopefully, tell compelling human interest stories”

(Davis, 2012, p. 23). These profiles, which describe the athletes' personal lives and their journeys to the Olympics Games, accentuate the popularity of each athlete, bringing greater attention and promoting stronger fandom. The athletes' heroism becomes recognized with each event preformed, with the demonstration of their power, determination, and skill, they give inspiration to lives of the audience members.

The Olympics have been proven to promote extreme cultural popularity as well. The patriotism evident in the United States during this time is exceptional, and other countries promote their nationalism as well. Their athletes are competing to win more than a game, meet, or match against another city like Austin or Chicago; they compete against other top countries in the world to prove dominance, pride, and power. The Olympics can become more than just a volleyball or basketball game, it can be the game that separates one country from another in political ideologies as well. An example is when the United States hockey team played the Soviet Union in the 1980 Olympic Games. Abelson (2010) states that, with this Game taking place during the Cold War:

Any major event that involved a matchup between the Soviets and Americans—whether it was a chess tournament or, in this case, a hockey game—was bound to be viewed as not only a confrontation between the world's two superpowers, but as a competition between two very different political systems and sets of ideological beliefs (p. 65).

Another example is when Jesse Owens, an Olympic track and field athlete from the 1936 Berlin Games, was recognized as a hero for refuting the Nazi Germany ideologies. Although his four gold medals were quite impressive, the “defining characteristic of Owens was his single-handed defeat of Hitler's theories of Aryan superiority” (Milford,

2012, p. 491). These examples illustrate how the Games can easily be turned to the purposes of greater world causes.

Despite the global potential for ideological good that the Olympics provide, some of the largest benefactors of Olympic popularity are product producers. In addition to televised athlete profiles, the amount of advertisements and Olympic-sponsored items has become exponentially greater as companies have invested up to \$240 million to be a TOP (The Olympic Partner) sponsor (Davis, 2012)., Advertising has been well recognized within media for years by scholars. Numerous researchers have studied various communication theories to help explain why an individual might be persuaded by one advertisement and not another. One such theory that has received much attention in relation to an advertisement's persuasive effectiveness is the elaboration likelihood model (ELM). This theory, developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1981) focuses on the way individuals process messages through two routes of persuasion (central and peripheral) and how these different processing routes can result in an attitude change. However, a theory that has not been used as often to study advertising is social cognitive theory (SCT). This theory, originally developed from social learning theory, examines how and why individuals use observation and modeling to learn behaviors. Bandura (1986) explains how rewards and punishments with reinforcement can change one's behavior. The individual must be able to identify, or have a strong psychological connection to the model in order for the behavior change to be likely to occur.

Studies have shown how modeling and observing rewards and punishments within media may lead to changes in behavior. Such changes might be due to external factors such as identification. According to Pajares, Prestin, Chen, and Nabi (2009),

“Identification refers to the extent to which an individual relates to a model and perceives the model to be similar to himself or herself” (p. 291). When identification with a character is present and coupled with the observation of a reward, then the likelihood of a viewer modeling the behavior is increased. However, there is some debate as to whether a modeled behavior must be positive as opposed to negative. Risky behavior with a character who is highly identifiable, even with a negative reinforcement can still lead to behavioral change (Pajares et al., 2009). Whether the modeled behavior is positive or negative, research suggests that strong identification is crucial in the learning of a behavioral act.

There are several types of identification that have been established through communication research. Social identity theory explains how “our identities are developed and how we maintain our self-view” (Guerrero, Anderson, & Afifi, 2011, p. 23). For example, organizational identification occurs when individuals come to identify with their workplace and can define themselves within the organization (Cherney, Christensen, Zorn, & Ganesh, 2011). For the purpose of this study however, sports identification will be the main focus. Sports identification can be defined as when a sports fan has a psychological attachment to a sport or a team (Dietz-Uhler, & Lanter, 2008). This occurs when a fan becomes more than just a spectator (someone who physically watches the games) and feels an actual attachment to the sport or team. Sports identification differs in that it can affect the individual cognitively, behaviorally, or affectively. A cognitive connection involves having considerable knowledge for the different aspects of the game or statistics about the player. Behavioral connections can be shown by physical qualities an individual might demonstrate such as aggression, and

affective connections are the extreme feelings that an individual possess about the game, sport and/or athlete such as sympathy or enjoyment. Further, fans are able to connect with each other by bonding over many different aspects of the sport, be it the sport itself, the team, or the individual athletes, separating this form of identification from others previously stated. Acquiring identification with a sport, athlete, and/or team can change how an individual conceptualizes or evaluates a situation (Dietz-Uhler, & Lanter, 2008).

How one identifies with a sport or team can be directly related to social cognitive theory. The theory is reliant on the need for the individual to identify with the model for the behavioral act to be learned most efficiently. Through observing the rewards and punishments of a model, and identifying with the model, the individual will be more likely to learn and potentially copy the behavioral acts themselves. As athletes are celebrated for their success and made into celebrity figures, this can be seen as a positive reward. In fact, even when celebrity athletes make “mistakes,” many times they are still celebrated. For example, Tiger Woods was negatively punished for his mistakes by losing many of his endorsement deals (“Gatorade cuts ties,” 2010); however, he is still celebrated as a world champion golfer and still competes today (“Summing up Tiger Woods’ 2013,” 2013). Another example involving a sports icon with a negative scandal is Kobe Bryant. Even in the midst of his sexual assault scandal in 2003, there were still 1200 babies born in L.A. who were named Kobe (Rushin, 2004). This further demonstrates that individuals, and fans specifically, are still supportive and willing to forgive when their favorite athletes make mistakes. When an individual sees an advertisement with these qualities in the athlete model, they will be likely to identify with the athlete through the media. And more than just national athletes, Olympic athletes are

seen as heroes and are recognized as powerful, inspirational, and accomplished individuals, making them even more desirable. As all these characteristics are attractive and perceived as achievable, individuals are able to identify with them easily. Further, Olympic athletes have the opportunity to win gold medals, making the reward enviable. Individuals are not only identifying with the Olympians through the sporting event, but with their nation as well. They are able to show their patriotism in a nonpolitical or controversial way. Many individuals who do not watch sports throughout the year may still watch the Olympics, which transcends interest in any particular sport or athlete (Deford, 2012).

Therefore, identification will likely take place with Olympic athletes, explained by the individual's self-efficacy, their patriotic dispositions, and their desire for the positive rewards of gold medals and fame. Further, because these attributes are expressed when an Olympian is an endorser for a product in an advertisement, it is likely that the endorser will influence the consumer's intent to purchase based on the intensity of the identification (noted from social cognitive theory) to the athlete or the nationalism that is represented through the athlete. Advertisers spend billions of dollars on advertisements, and specifically on endorsement deals, begging the question of if they work, and if so, why? It is therefore important to examine the Olympics, endorsement deals, identification, and how these factors may influence one's intent to purchase to determine the answers to these questions.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **Olympics**

Every four years, thousands of athletes from hundreds of countries come together to celebrate and to compete in a world event. The Olympics have been a part of modern history dating back to 1896, where the Games were revived in Athens, as that is where they originated. According to Toohey and Veal (2000), “The earliest records of the Olympic Games indicated that they were held as early as 776 BC” (p. 9), although it is possible that the Games existed even prior to that date. During this time, the Olympic Games were considered the most prestigious event. Only Greek males were able to compete in an event called the *Stade*, or a 192-meter footrace around an arena (Davis, 2012; Toohey & Veal, 2000). There were no teams, only individual events, and winning an event meant social status and prestige. As the Games grew in numbers of athletes competing, they also increased in events. To prepare, athletes began training, sought spells and potions before competitions to help give them an edge, and even gave bribes to officials to guarantee a victory and praise (Toohey & Veal, 2000).

Comparably today, athletes seek endorsement deals to help finance and bring recognition before the Games begin, during the Games, and after the Games are completed. The cost of the Olympic Games has also risen incredibly. In the 2012 London Olympics, 10,500 athletes competed for 302 gold medals. Moreover, nine million ticket

were sold, and the estimated cost of London's Olympic Stadium was about \$775 million dollars (CNN World, 2012). As seen, the Olympics have come a long way, but athletes are still competing for honor, rewards and fame. Countries still give a financial reward for winning a gold, silver, or bronze medal. In the 2012 London Olympics, athletes from the United States won \$25,000 for a gold medal, \$15,000 for a silver medal and \$10,000 for a bronze medal (Davis, 2012). Other countries, such as Russia, offered a reward as high as \$236,000 for winning a gold medal in table tennis. Athletes thus earn the opportunity to buy a home, afford education or training, or provide for financial comfort and security. This indicates that although there have been drastic changes, the benefits of winning an event still offer a great tangible incentive for athletes. Even though the athlete benefits are still present, the organization for the Olympics has changed and become much more official. Long gone are the abilities to bribe officials; now there are authorized committees set out to ensure that each Olympic Game is as successful and ethically run as possible.

The Olympic Movement is the group led by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and represents the Games, athletes, and spokespersons for all Olympic committees. Its official goal is to "contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practiced without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play" (Theodoraki, 2007, p. 53). The International Olympic Committee (IOC) was founded in 1894 by Baron Pierre de Coubertin and is the supreme authority in the Olympic Movement. The IOC differs from other world sporting event associations in that they have a set of idiosyncratic values developed through the Olympic Charter (Houlihan, 1994). The Olympic Charter is set forth to address the legal



status of the IOC. The IOC's committee consists of a president, an executive board, and currently 106 members and 32 honorary members (Cho, 2012). It is their job to ensure that the four goals are held and demonstrated during every Game. These goals are:

- Promoting the development of those physical and moral qualities that are the basis of sport
- Educating young people through sport in a spirit of mutual understanding and friendship, thereby helping to build a better and more peaceful world
- Spreading the Olympic principles throughout the world, thereby creating international goodwill
- Bringing together the athletes of the world in the Olympic Games every four years (Payne, 2008, p. 85).

In addition to the IOC, there is an International Sport Federation (IF) and National Olympic Committee (NOC) and these two organizations also contribute to the Olympic cause. The IF is a “nongovernmental organization responsible for the administration of the one or more sports at the international level” (Cho, 2012, p. 93). For the NOC, there are 204 committees, which represent national athletes and select the ones that will attend the Olympic Games. It is through these three committees that the rules and regulations of every Olympic Game are set in place.

The sponsors for the Olympics are specifically chosen as well. They are known as The Olympic Partners (TOP). There are currently ten worldwide TOP Partners. They are Coca-Cola, Atos, Dow, General Electric, McDonalds, Omega, Panasonic, Procter and Gamble, Samsung, and Visa ([www.olympics.org/sponsors](http://www.olympics.org/sponsors), 2013). According to Davis (2012), the “Olympic dream-concept is loaded with vivid imagery and powerful

associations like authenticity, mythology, mystique, and the pinnacle of sport that are simultaneously positive, motivating, and virtuous” (p. 5), demonstrating how, depending on the company (all of these are powerful international corporations), this can be a perfect fit if the company wishes to show that they too are authentic, a pinnacle industry, powerful and so on.

The Olympics are not only about the organization and the athletes; they are also about the viewers and the fans. Even back in 776 BC, fans would fill the arena to watch athletes compete. Today, we have a multitude of media channels that allow fans from all over the world to enjoy watching their country’s athletes compete against those of other countries for pride in the sport, the athlete, and his/her country. An average of 31.1 million Americans viewers tuned in to watch the 2012 London Olympic Games (“London Olympics 2012 ratings”, 2012), demonstrating their popularity. As mentioned, individuals who may not watch sports regularly tune in to watch the Olympics because it can give them the opportunity to feel pride for their country. It gives them an outlet to show their nationalism. Further, while viewers watch the Olympics, they form connections with the athletes due to the athletes’ own nationalistic tendencies, strengths, and skills. Fans connect with the athletes and become attracted to the possibility of also being able to improve their status. This relates back to the idea of Horatio Alger and the American dream. Alger’s original stories revolved around a humble man who might have been an orphan, or in a family that had fallen upon hard times; however, eventually he would find a mentor to guide him on his way to success (Sarachek, 1978). The Olympics are full of stories relating to these themes. For example one male gymnast in the 2012 Olympics, John Orozco, gained media attention because he was an underprivileged youth

from the Bronx who made it out of the gang life to become an Olympic star (Gallagher, 2012). The viewers of such stories become attached to the hopes that they, too, will be able to make it out of their social class status and attain a higher social standing. Additionally, athletes such as this one demonstrate much pride in their countries, making it easy for fans to identify with them. Many of the characteristics found in individuals who are able to work their way up from rags to riches are also identified in a hero/heroine. The word hero originated from Warrior tales, however, the term now most frequently seems to be found in media coverage when speaking of athletes and sporting events (Goodman, Duke, & Sutherland, 2002). Media celebrate the American Dream (e.g., Horatio Alger) through the athletes of sporting events, and give them the title of hero. The myth of a hero has now been operationalized by Williams (1994) and Lule (2001) into different elements from the “journey outward (innocence, departure, and abandonment) and the trip back (experience and wisdom, reunion, and absolution), and Lule expanded it to four [elements]: humble descent, the quest, triumph, and return” (Hoebeke, Deprez, & Raeymaeckers, 2011, p. 560). It is through this definition that we can recognize athletes as heroes, especially those who have worked their way to the top, as in the Horatio Alger ideology.

### **Olympic Media Coverage**

Perelman (2012) states that “Sport has itself become the world’s most powerful mass medium” (p. 32), as it is local, national, and even international in an event such as the Olympics. Numerous media studies have investigated sports and Olympics and their various effects such as gender roles, news framing, advertising roles, and media coverage. For example, Jones (2013) examined the online coverage of the 2008 Olympic

Games to understand how women's sports have a secondary status in traditional media. The researcher sought to find strategies that media use by conducting a content analysis of the online coverage of the 2008 Summer Olympic Games. Jones found that the media favor men to women with a margin of four to one. Men were not only given more attention, but their achievements and pictures were much more prominent. In a different study, Jones and Greer (2012) examined audiences' attitudes and gender roles in the extreme sport, snowboarding, during the 2010 Winter Olympics. Researchers used a multi-method design, which included a content analysis and surveys. They found that respondents who watched more women's coverage rated the sport as more feminine compared to males who watched more male coverage and rated the sport as more masculine. Additionally, unlike in the previous study, male and female airtime was about equal, which was a new and interesting finding. Finally, demographics, sex and ethnicity were unrelated to attitudes, but age was linked to perceptions of aggression. These are just a few of the gender-related media studies but there have been others (Angelini, MacArthur, & Billings, 2012; Li, 2011; Poniatowski, & Hardin, 2012).

In addition to gender roles, studies have also covered the frequency of Olympic-related advertising. Maguire, Butler, Barnard, and Golding (2008) examined the frequency of TOP sponsors, logos, company product in broadcast ads, and Olympian themes. They did this using a content analysis of the British press and television coverage during the 2004 Athens Olympics. Researchers found that when Olympic themes were present, TOP sponsors focused specifically on the theme of "excellence." Further, the Olympic rings were in about 60% of the Olympic-related press advertisements, and Samsung was featured most often (35%) in Olympic-related broadcast advertisements.

Although these media-related findings have extended Olympic research, the Olympics still lack research regarding advertising sponsorship roles, the use of sports related themes, and the specific athletes used to promote sales.

### **Advertising**

Advertising companies have been using different appeals to attract viewership for decades. It is no surprise that advertisements use a variety of persuasive tactics to try to promote intent to purchase from potential and current customers. As such, advertisers look for any available means to persuasion, including the appeal of celebrity endorsements and sponsorship deals. As mentioned previously, numerous studies have looked at advertising effectiveness. One approach used frequently in such studies is the elaboration likelihood model. Petty and Cacioppo (1981) claim that there are two routes of persuasion, central and peripheral, and depending on how an individual processes the messages will determine if attitude change will be obtained. The central route is used when an individual carefully examines the content of the message, looking at the strength of the argument and the use of the language. Conversely, the peripheral route is used when an individual does not think critically about the message, and focuses on external environmental indicators instead (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). Researchers have used this theory to examine how the central versus peripheral routes relate to source attractiveness (Sliburyte, 2009), celebrity-product congruence (Misra & Beatty, 1990), celebrity multiplicity (Hsu & McDonald, 2002) and celebrity activation and professional success (Daneshvary & Schwer, 2000).

Researchers have studied how individuals process messages to see if central and peripheral processing are effective and, additionally, have used these processing

determinants to see if they are also dependent on other factors. For example, Trampe, Stapel, Siero, and Mulder (2010) developed a study to examine the roles of ELM and product relevance when determining the effectiveness of physically attractive models within advertising. Product relevance occurs when a model relates to the product he/she is endorsing, such as an athlete promoting athletic gear, or an aged woman with pure skin promoting age-reducing facial cream. The advertisements' persuasiveness was affected by the relevance of the product and the extent to which the product related to physical attractiveness. Therefore, researchers sought to find whether the relatability, or, the attractive model provokes the customer to elaborate on the advisement. Researchers found that product relevance plays an important role in predicting elaboration likelihood and thus persuasiveness, when attractive (versus less attractive) models are used in advertising. In other words, there was a direct link between having high elaboration and product relevance. Participants who viewed an attractive model, and spent cognitive effort on the advertisement, had a more positive view towards the product. Trampe et al.'s (2010) study shows that making a product more evident by appealing to the attractiveness or even recognizability of the celebrity might bring in consumers, because most individuals would consider celebrity sponsors to be attractive. Therefore, analyzing how celebrities and spokespersons are used within advertising is worthy of discussion.

Celebrity sponsorship is not a new area of study, but it is still relevant because the industry is rapidly changing and evolving. Sliburyte (2009) looked at how celebrities can be used successfully in advertising and found some key characteristics. One such characteristic was that elaboration likelihood was a key factor when analyzing advertisements. Specifically, celebrity-product congruence emerged when examining the

differences between central and peripheral routes to persuasion. As noted in ELM, when an individual is processing peripherally, celebrity endorsements are shown to be much more effective. Second, the characteristics of the celebrity are also noted in the importance of the effectiveness of persuasion. Ohanian's (1991) study on celebrities' impact on branding defined a celebrity as "people who enjoy the public recognition by a large share of a certain group of people" (p. 3). The study showed that when the celebrity endorser was perceived as an expert on the promoted product, it was likely to be seen as more convincing and therefore, more likely to provoke a positive brand attitude among consumers, than when compared with noncelebrity counterparts. Ohanian has created a scale to measure celebrity spokespersons' perceived credibility. She accomplishes this by measuring trustworthiness, attractiveness, and expertise. Through these variables, Ohanian discovered that the credibility of the celebrity can be paired with celebrity fit. Various authors have used Ohanian's measure to investigate the link between celebrity credibility and things like endorsement fit and attitudes toward event (Charbonneau & Garland, 2006), intentions to purchase tickets to an event (Fink, Cunningham, & Kensicki, 2004), and the gender of celebrities with regards to consumers' attitudes (Klaus & Bailey, 2008).

Media analyses have explored celebrities as endorsers as well. Belch and Belch (2013) did a content analysis of celebrity endorsements in magazine advertising. The researchers first found that only ten percent of advertisements in magazines contained a celebrity out of the 37 magazines that were analyzed. However, within those ten percent, the use of celebrities varied by magazine type, and sports magazines and teen magazines used celebrities most. Second, the use of celebrities also varied by product, and

characteristics such as likeability and attractiveness were used, and expertise was a primary factor for the athletic products.

As stated above, Hollywood celebrities are not the only individuals used in advertising for endorsements; use of athletes has become a widely accepted form of persuasion as well. Numerous studies examined how athletes are not a ‘form of peers.’ According to Chen-Yueh, Yi-Hsiu, and Chia-Lin (2012), these endorsements have been used “as a means to cut through advertising clutter and to attract viewer attention. Celebrities and celebrity athletes have appeared to bring benefits to events that other endorsers could not” (p. 210). It is important to note that being an athlete does not make the individual a celebrity; however, there are celebrity athletes. Just as these concepts are not mutually exclusive, neither is the relationship between hero and celebrity. In this study, researchers sought to find if viewer attitudes towards a sporting event (baseball) were improved after seeing a celebrity baseball endorser. They found that, indeed, pairing the athlete and the event created a more favorable attitude towards the event than the individuals exposed to only the event with no athlete sponsor. Additionally, Charbonneau and Garland (2006) examined how to pair a celebrity athlete with an endorsement product. They found that the match-up between athlete and product influences perceptions of credibility, when comparing an athlete in a sports-brand product versus a non-sports-brand product.

Identifying the roles of athletes promoting non-sport-brands provides some interesting results. Lear, Runyan, and Whitaker (2008) conducted a study to investigate sports celebrity endorsements exclusively sold by retailers involving print media. Using a content analysis, the researchers found that there has been no decline in print



advertisements, and a significant increase in the number of celebrity athlete endorsements. They further found that baseball and football players are ultimately used more frequently when advertising for retailers. This indicates that print advertising is still necessary and effective, but that other sports, besides the popular men's sports of baseball and football should be examined. Applying the notion of celebrity fit used above, Koernig and Boyd (2009) looked at the effect of how well an athlete endorser "fit" with the product compared to an unknown model, when a non-sports-brand was used. In order to examine the match-up effect in the context of the celebrity athlete as a product endorser, researchers randomly assigned participants to view one of two types of photos-- one with a celebrity endorser and one without. The researcher found that perceived trust in the product, perceived expertise of the athlete on the topic of the product, and prior attitude toward the brand versus post exposure attitude were influential on whether or not the celebrity advertisement was significantly more effective than the non-celebrity advertisement. This further demonstrates that sports celebrities have credibility and are still well liked even when promoting non-sports-brand products. However, this study does not look into the identification that a consumer has with the celebrity endorser, which is a crucial variable.

As seen, celebrities, like actors, models, and athletes, have been studied to determine their effectiveness in advertising. Sponsorship roles can cost companies thousands of dollars and are sometimes ineffective, depending on the fit, congruence, attitudes and etcetera, but studies continue. This is largely in part to researchers wanting to know how effective their messages are when heading towards the marketing goal: for

customers to purchase the product. Elberse and Verleun (2012) studied the economic value of athlete celebrity endorsement and found some interesting results.

This study of athlete endorsements finds there is a positive pay-off to a firm's decision to sign an endorser, and that endorsements are associated with increasing sales in an absolute sense *and* relative to competing brands. Furthermore, sales and stock returns jump noticeably with each major achievement by the athlete (p. 149).

While most of these studies have pertained to Western civilization, other countries have also examined the effects of celebrity endorsers. Liu and Brock (2011) examine female athlete endorsers in China to determine the effect of attractiveness, match-up, and consumer gender differences to determine the purchase intentions within the context of China. Their main focus was to determine if these variables would influence consumers' purchase intent. They found that the attractiveness of female athlete endorsers affected Chinese consumers' intent to purchase more than the match-up of the product. Another study focusing on whether celebrity endorsements have an impact on consumers buying behaviors was conducted by Banerjee, Banerjee, and Patwardhan (2012). Looking in Gwalior, India, researchers found that endorsing by a celebrity had a positive impact on the behavior of the consumers. Many other studies have also looked at intention to purchase (Fink, Cunningham, & Kensicki, 2004; Koernig, & Boyd, 2009; Ohanian, 1991).

Olympians are seen as experts in their sport, and this perceived expertise can potentially be transferred to a brand's value. Moreover, because nationalism is invoked by Olympic athletes, customers will most likely already have an inherent trust in the

athlete. Additionally, making it to the Olympics is a huge accomplishment; therefore, the athlete has demonstrated achievements even before the Olympic events begin. Finally, these athletes differ from national athletes because, unlike them, they are not being paid yearly to compete, may have a humble presence, and are competing to win for their country and, therefore, for the consumer's country as well. However, in order for consumers to make these various connections, identification must take place.

### **Theoretical Perspective: Social Cognitive Theory**

As mentioned previously there has been an abundance of studies relating advertising to elaboration likelihood model; however, other theoretical perspectives may offer something for our understanding of athlete endorsement. Social cognitive theory (SCT) is a behavioral theory that is used to examine observational learning. According to this theory, individuals are human agents, and personal, behavioral, and environmental determinants all play a factor in the learning process. Originally developed as social learning theory (SLT) (Miller & Dollard, 1941), this theory revolved around the concept of learning through observation and imitation. SLT emphasized that if an individual is motivated, then, through reinforcement and observation of a model, a behavior can be learned. Despite the appeal of this theory, it lacked thoroughness in the explanation of why individuals imitated the actions and why they initiated the behaviors originally. Bandura and Walters in 1963 expanded these concepts with social modeling, observational learning, and vicarious reinforcement. Later still (1986), Bandura advanced the theory also to include cognitive, vicarious, self-regulatory, and self-reflective processes mandatory in the process of human adaption and change (Pajares, Prestin, Chen, & Nabi, 2009).

Social cognitive theory therefore expanded and was developed greatly between 1963 and 1986, and this theory is still being further developed today. Bandura believes that individuals are self-developing and proactive, and not reactive beings (Bandura, 1986), or, in other words, he believes in human agency. Self-reactiveness, an aspect of agency, is the idea that individuals construct and regulate their own courses of action. Additionally, self-reflectiveness is one's reflection on one's own actions or thoughts. Both these concepts are crucial in the development of learning. It is through these properties of agency that individuals are able to symbolize and have the cognitive ability to influence their behaviors (Pajares et al., 2009). People expand their knowledge by "operating symbolically on the wealth of information derived from personal and vicarious experiences" (Bandura, 2009, p. 95). Learning occurs when an individual observes a behavior and then has a desire to enact that behavior; however, just because an individual observes a behavior does not mean that it is automatically learned. There are a variety of factors that influence learning, from personal (cognitive and biological influences) to behavioral patterns, to environmental events (Bandura, 2001), and this is known as the triadic reciprocal causation in the causal model of social cognitive theory. Bandura expands these concepts to state that observational learning is governed by four subfunctions: attentional processes, retention processes, production processes, and motivational processes (Bandura, 1986, 2009). Each of these subfunctions has influential factors to determine if the modeled event will have a matched pattern by the observer.

As mentioned previously, social modeling is not just behavioral imitation, it is influenced by cognitive skills and motivation. Such motivators might include seeing a desired outcome by the actions of others, and this can create a positive outcome

expectancy. By contrast, observing a punishment for an action might create a negative outcome expectancy (Bandura, 1986). Viewing the punishment of a behavior is known as an inhibitory effect, compared to the reward of a behavior, which is known as a disinhibitory effect. Whether a modeled behavior contains an inhibitory or disinhibitory effect will determine if the observer will be more or less likely to perform the behavior. An example of one area where this has been studied is in the examination of modeling of violence or negative behavior observed through media. For example, Paek, Reid, Choi, and Jeong (2010) researched cigarette advertisements with relation to social cognitive theory. Looking at the frequency of health information across five eras and relating this information to SCT, researchers found that the portrayals of “young and attractive models” smoking and offering cigarettes to friends can be associated with “perceived benefits and positive outcome expectations of smoking” (p. 783).

Along with this, self-efficacy also plays a role in the likelihood of modeling behaviors. Self-efficacy beliefs are “judgments that individuals hold about their capabilities to perform a behavior at a designated level” (Pajares et al., 2009, p. 286). Bandura (1993) argues that individuals set goals for themselves and that personal goal setting is influenced by the self-appraisal and capabilities to accomplish this set goal. Therefore, the stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the likelihood of the person to set a goal, and feel committed to it. This explains how individuals can be influenced through observation and modeling. If a person has a perceived high self-efficacy for the modeled behavior, then he/she will be more likely to try this behavior. Self-efficacy can therefore affect motivation, performance, and achievement in an array of disciplines. Peng (2008) conducted an experiment on the concept of mediated enactive experiences to

understand game-playing effects on self-efficacy and health promotion. The experiment consisted of two groups either playing a game (meditated enactive experience) or watching a game being played (mediated observational experience). The researcher found that the mediated enactive experience was most effective in influencing participants' self-efficacy and adapting to a healthy diet. Further, the study also indicated that identification was a partial attributor for the relationship between experience and self-efficacy.

### **Identification**

Just as self-efficacy has the ability to influence individuals' behaviors, their identification with the model will also influence the behavioral act. Identification is "a particular form of imitation in which copying a model, generalized beyond specific acts, springs from wanting to be and trying to be like the model with respect to some broader quality (White, 1972, p. 252). Therefore, if a person feels a strong psychological connection to the model, then social learning may occur. This connection may occur due to similarities between the model and the observer in terms of demographics, physical characteristics, personality traits, attitudes or beliefs. Thus, the link between identification and self-efficacy can be understood that if people believe they have the ability to be like the person with whom they are identifying, then the probability of modeling that person would increase. Bandura (2011) supports this by stating that the greater the perceived similarity to the model, the greater the likelihood of observational learning to occur.

Identification has been examined in a multitude of media studies in the past, many of which have focused on aggression or negative behaviors and media. Huesmann, Lagerspetz, and Eron (1984) found that children who identified with aggressive television characters had an increased learning of aggressive behavior. They were more influenced

by the television scenes, and believed that the behaviors were more appropriate or expected when a strong identification occurred. Another area of research where identification played a key role in the findings was with MacCoby and Wilson's 1957 study. Here the researchers found that what the viewer learns from a film may depend on the character with whom he/she chooses to identify. Additionally, a viewer is most likely to identify with a character who has similar characteristics such as sex or age. Basil (1996) looked at the effects of celebrity endorsements on consumer behavior. When looking at personal concern, perceived risk, and sexual behaviors, a year after Magic Johnson announced that he was HIV positive, he found that identification mediated the message effect: When identification with a spokesperson occurred there was a greater likelihood for lasting attitude and behavioral change.

As public interest in Magic Johnson attests, and it has been stated above, individuals are enticed by athletes and deem them to be credible sources; thus, further exploration of how individuals identify with athletes, teams, and sports in general is warranted. Sports fans can be described in a variety of ways. Nonetheless, they are unique group of individuals who exhibit a shared love for a team, region, athlete or sport. The identification that a fan has with these different classifications can depend on a multitude of factors, such as personality traits like self-esteem or competitiveness, environmental factors like cultural backgrounds, and social factors like one's arousal level and the influence of friends (Hugenberg, Haridakis, & Earnhardt, 2008). These are very clearly related to the causal model of social cognitive theory, which includes personal, behavioral, and environment factors. Fans are able to connect with each other as well, whether it be while watching a game at a sporting event or through an online

interactive message board. Through these mediums, sports fandom and identification can become stronger. The psychological, cognitive, or behavioral connection felt by sports fans (as opposed to spectators who are just physically present or watching the game) (Dietz-Uhler & Lanter, 2008) means that they are readily able to give cognitive and evaluative information about the team sport or athlete. Dietz-Uhler and Lanter (2008) believe that when sports fans identify strongly with a team there are affective, cognitive and behavioral consequences. Affective consequences can include having extreme feelings of “arousal, sympathy, post-game effect, and enjoyment.” Cognitive consequences include having team “knowledge, perceptions of teams and fans, and attributions.” Finally, the behavioral consequences are “self-presentational strategies, loyalty, aggression, prosocial behavior, and psychological well-being” (pp. 106-108). These aspects are important to consider in the discussion of how one specifically identifies as a fan with a team or athlete.

Davis (2012) states that, with regards to fandom and the Olympics, there are three types of “enthusiasts”: intense, shared, and casual. The intense enthusiasts are the fans with the deepest connection. They watch hours of TV coverage and feel the intensity of the Olympic Games. “They may have a favorite sport, but they also watch other sports simply because they are part of the Olympics” (p. 267). They compete in sports themselves, or make an effort to stay active regularly. The shared enthusiasts differ from the intense fans in that they enjoy watching the games in a shared community as opposed to watching by oneself, like the intense fans prefer. Further, they also feel a connection because they like to play sports, but will most likely only watch the highlights each day as opposed to spending hours watching daily. Finally, the casual enthusiasts are more



relaxed when it comes to the Olympics and will only pay peripheral attention to the Games; they will tune in occasionally or when friends are discussing a surprising event. They are also more likely to be nonathletic (Davis, 2012).

### **Hypotheses**

The sports identification one has for a team or athlete can therefore relate back to the core ideas of social cognitive theory. Positive outcomes experienced by Olympian athletes such as winning a gold medal, being internationally promoted, and demonstrating patriotism and credibility, will all be seen as rewards; they will have a disinhibitory effect and therefore will increase observational learning. Based on social cognitive theory, identification will be more likely to occur if the consumers identify with the athlete; however, as noted above, the Olympic team represents the nation, and therefore, identification with the team may also influence intent to purchase. Further, consumers will identify more with a celebrity (any Olympian) rather than a non-famous spokesperson due to the connection that is present, and this might also influence intent to purchase. Additionally, because Olympian athletes exhibit attributes worthy of evoking affective, cognitive, and behavioral consequences (Dietz-Uhler & Lanter, 2008), having fans connect to the athletes can lead them to view athletes as credible sources. As mentioned by Ohanian (1991), expertise becomes a key factor when examining an endorser in an advertisement. Finally, as stated previously, athletes' expertise, mixed with the disinhibitory effects (gold medals and fame) can lead consumers to purchase an endorsed item. This leads to the following hypotheses:

- H1: There is a positive correlation between the identification the consumer has with the famous Olympian athlete and the perceived credibility of the Olympian athlete.
- H2: There is a positive correlation between the identification the consumer has with the famous Olympian athlete, and the intent to purchase the Olympian athlete endorsed item.
- H3: There is a positive correlation between the perceived credibility of the Olympian athlete and the intent to purchase the Olympian athlete endorsed item.
- H4: There is a positive correlation between the identification the consumer has with the Olympian team, and the intent to purchase the Olympian athlete endorsed item.
- H5: There will be a difference in level of participant identification between the famous Olympic athlete, a lesser known Olympic athlete, and an unknown college athlete.
- H6: There will be a difference in intent to purchase between the famous Olympic athlete, a lesser known Olympic athlete, and an unknown college athlete.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the literature that is relevant for the focus of this study. It first addressed the Olympic Games and all aspects of the organization, including research on media-related studies pertaining to the Olympics. The discussion moved on to advertising, focusing on endorsement roles and the use of celebrity figures within

advertising as a persuasive technique. This chapter concludes with the discussion of social cognitive theory and, specifically, the identification one can have with an athlete, sport, or team. The chapter concludes, therefore, that the primary components that will be studied in this thesis are the consumer's identification with the athletes, the athletes' credibility, and the consumer's intent to purchase.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

The previous chapter reviewed the relevant literature for the focus of this study. It gave attention to the Olympic Games, advertising, and social cognitive theory. The Olympics section specifically looked at the history, federation, and the relevance of the Olympics. This leads to how celebrity endorsements within advertising can be used as a persuasive technique, especially when the celebrity is deemed credible and has a good reputation. Finally, the chapter introduced social cognitive theory as a theoretical perspective to see how a person's identification with an athlete can influence the persuasiveness of an advertisement. Therefore, three specific variables were involved in this study: the consumer's identification with the Olympian athlete, the Olympian athletes' credibility, and the consumer's intent to purchase. This chapter will describe the method that was used to test the hypotheses previously stated.

#### **Participants**

Participants were 245 students at a mid-sized public Midwestern U.S. university. Research participants were sent an invitation through intercampus email to log onto an internet survey hosted on Select Survey, a survey software-delivery program. Participants who received the email consisted of all students who chose to not opt out of receiving solicitations from the university. The email topic was presented as "product perceptions,"

and the opening line of the email was, “We invite you to participate in a research study of perceptions of advertising messages,” followed by information regarding anonymity and contact information. The survey was sent out on February 11, 2014 and was closed on March 17, 2014 with no follow up reminders. These dates coincided with the 2014 Winter Olympics, which took place from February 6, 2014, through February 23, 2014. Undergraduate and graduate students of all disciplines at the university were invited to participate. The survey link randomly sent participants to one of three surveys, each displaying one of three different athletes. Sex was determined through demographic questions administered through the survey along with year in school.

The dependent variable in this study is the consumer’s intent to purchase the endorsed product. The independent variables are 1) the conditions each participant received (famous Olympian, lesser-known U.S. Olympian, unknown college swimmer), 2) the consumer’s identification with Michael Phelps, the United States Olympian and therefore United States team, and the random swimmer, and 3), the perceived credibility of Michael Phelps, the United States Olympian and therefore the United States team, and the random athletic swimmer. These variables were operationalized through previously developed measures.

## **Data Collection**

### **Survey**

The instrument consisted one of three images followed by 40 open- and closed-ended questions in three sections including Ohanian’s (1990) celebrity credibility scale, a measure constituted from modified items from Wann and Branscombe’s (1990) sports fan measure, and a third measure with items from Wann and Branscombe’s (1993) team

identification scale. Additionally, some open-ended personal and demographic questions were asked. This survey took participants approximately 15-20 minutes to complete, based on a pilot test.

The images that were presented to the participants consisted of three athletic swimmers, Michael Phelps, a United States gold medalist Olympian, and an unknown college swimmer as endorsers for a product. An Olympian athlete is defined for this study as any athlete who has competed in the Olympic Games. The first Olympian athlete chosen for this study is Michael Phelps, as he is a well-recognized Olympic swimmer. He is the most-decorated Olympian of all time, holding 22 medals, 18 of which are gold, creating a world record in medals won in addition to his many world records in swimming. He has endorsed many products with his celebrity status including Omega watches, Frosted Flakes, Corn Flakes, and Subway. The second Olympian is Matt Grevers, a less known but still decorated Olympian with six Olympic Medals, his latest in the 100-meter backstroke in the 2012 Summer Games. Finally, the unknown, non-Olympic swimmer is David Nolan, a Stanford University swimmer. All three swimmers are in the pool, waiting for the results of the race. All pictures have been manipulated to have a sepia filter. Michael Phelps' image has the words "GO WORLD" printed across the image and "LIFE TAKES VISA" with the Olympic rings printed on the bottom right-hand corner. Phelps' hands are up to his face in a praying position, and his swim cap says "VISA" and Phelps across the side. In the second image, image as well. Finally, Nolan is looking towards a scoreboard with one hand on the wall; however, only the words "LIFE TAKES VISA" are printed in the bottom right-hand corner. No national or Olympic symbol is present. Grevers is looking up towards a scoreboard with one hand on the wall.

The American flag is clearly printed on the side of his swim cap. The words “GO WORLD” are also printed across the image and “LIFE TAKES VISA” with the Olympic rings is printed on the bottom right-hand corner.

Following the image, a questionnaire was presented which began by asking participants questions about celebrity credibility. This was measured with a scale Ohanian (1990) developed through looking at three different variables: attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. All three dimensions are measured using five items on a semantic differential scale rating from one to seven. Ohanian found attractiveness to have an average construct reliability of .90; trustworthiness, to have .90; and expertise, to have .89. Some examples of items from each dimension are: Handsome/Ugly, Sincere/Insincere and Skilled/Unskilled. The polarity of some items was reversed, such that a higher score reflected lower credibility, to reduce response bias. These items were chosen using a random number generator. Following the survey, said items were reverse coded, so that final item scores indicated greater credibility.

Next, a few items were taken from Wann and Branscombe’s (1990) sports fan measure. These include some semantic differential questions asking about the participants’ involvement in sports and some open-ended questions such as, “How many years have you been a fan of the Olympics?” Other items from the subscale, “Fans are Special” are also included. An example of an item from this category is, “What percent of your friends watch the Olympics?”

Wann and Branscombe’s (1993) team identification scale appeared in the next section of the survey. These questions were modified from the original focus of the K.U. basketball team to relate to Michael Phelps, the United States’ Olympic team, or the

random swimmer. That is, every time the original item mentioned the K.U. basketball team, the question was modified to make the item work for the singular athlete Michael Phelps or the random swimmer, or the plural United States' Olympic team. Wann and Branscombe reported the internal consistency (Cronbach's standardized alpha) of the original complete measure to be .91, and the measure reflected a single factor in factor analysis with an average item-total correlation of .59. Sample items measured on a seven-point scale include, "How strongly do YOU see YOURSELF as a fan of Michael Phelps? (Not at *All* a Fan/Very Much a Fan)?" and "How much do YOU dislike Michael Phelps greatest rivals? (Strongly Dislike/Strongly Like)?" Finally, a single-item question about whether the consumer plans to purchase the endorsed product was asked using the verbiage, "How likely are you to purchase this item? (Not Likely/Very Likely)?" The survey ends with questions regarding participant sex and year in school for demographic questions.

The sponsored brand in the advertisement that was shown to participants is Visa. As stated previously, all three images are of swimmers waiting for the results at the end of the pool. They all have the same sepia filter, and the two Olympians have the words "GO WORLD" across the image. Additionally, all three images have the words "LIFE TAKES VISA" in the bottom right-hand corner. This advertisement was chosen because, based on ELM, there is not a strong central-route between the athlete and Visa. In some of the other products endorsed by Michael Phelps, such as eating breakfast cereal, his athleticism can be a key factor to his endorsement to the brand, and thus would constitute an argument through the central route. However, because Visa and swimming are not directly related, a more peripheral processing route is likely. It is important to trigger



peripheral processing so that identification can be studied. A central processing route may interfere with the measure because otherwise the participant may be influenced by the logical reasoning of the message.

### **Procedure**

The survey was administered using Select Survey software in the spring of 2014. An invitation to the survey was sent through the university intercampus email to all eligible student university accounts. The email directed participants to a link to the survey where a random generator brought participants to one of the three versions of the survey. Upon starting the survey, participants saw an informed consent form that was completed before continuing on with the survey. Participants were then shown a picture of a Michael Phelps, Matt Grevers, or David Nolan endorsed advertisement. The advertisement, as previously stated, was for Visa and contained a picture of one of the three swimmers. Upon viewing one of the photos, participants were asked to answer questions about the advertisement in a survey which was explained above.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using SPSS 19 software. Before analysis, 7-items from the celebrity credibility measure were reverse-coded, so that a higher score reflected greater perception of credibility. Items from the celebrity credibility scale and the sports team identification scale were subjected to Cronbach's *alpha*. All 15 items of the celebrity credibility scale produced a .91 Cronbach's *alpha* reliability with no deletion of items. All 12 items of the team identification scale produced a .89 Cronbach's *alpha* reliability. While deleting items would increase the reliability a small amount, the intact scale had a strong reliability, so all items of the scale were retained. Items from each

subscale were added together to create the composite variables for analysis, celebrity credibility, team identification and sports fan identification.

The three original items taken from the fan identification scale that were in a 7-point scale were maintained, while the two items, “How many hours per week do you spend watching the Olympics?” and “What percent of your friends watch the Olympics?” needed to be recoded to a 7-point scale. To do so, the researcher divided up the cumulative percent into seven relatively even groups. From there the three original items were subjected to reliability analysis together with the two newly recoded items resulting in a .77 Cronbach’s *alpha*.

Hypotheses 1-4 were tested using a correlation. Specifically, a correlation was run between celebrity credibility, sports fan items, the team identification items, and intent to purchase. Then each of the three conditions (famous Olympian, less known gold medalist Olympian, unknown college athlete) was tested individually with celebrity credibility, sports fan items, team identification items, and intent to purchase. Hypotheses 5 and 6 were tested using an ANOVA and an ANCOVA. Follow up Scheffé post hoc tests were conducted to find where the significant differences lay, in cases where the ANOVA/ANCOVA was significant. Finally, descriptive statistics were reported for each condition. A manipulation check was put in place to determine if participants’ perceived the Olympians to be more credible than the non-Olympian. Celebrity credibility scores showed a significant ANOVA ( $F = 8.98$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .00$ ), so follow-up post hoc tests were conducted to examine these differences in more detail. Results show that celebrity credibility had significant differences between conditions one and three, and between conditions two and three, thus indicating that participants perceived the Olympians to be

more credible than the non-Olympian, but did not show that Michael Phelps was more credible than the lesser-known Olympian.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the method necessary to answer the hypotheses stated in the previous section. The chapter described the participants, variables, and the data collection process including the scales that will be used. This section also discussed the procedure and the data analysis that will be used once the surveys are completed.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The previous chapter reviewed the method used to test the hypotheses that were presented for this thesis. The chapter described the participants, the data collection, and the data analysis used to test the hypotheses. The current chapter presents the statistical analyses used to test the hypotheses presented in chapter two. The findings will demonstrate whether celebrity credibility, team identification and sports fan identification predict intent to purchase. The statistical findings for perceived expertise, identification, and intent to purchase are reported.

#### **Summary Findings**

Three conditions were produced based on the image each participant received. Condition one was created from the responses of the participants who received the photo of Michael Phelps, condition two was created from the responses of the participants who received the photo of the a United States gold medalist Olympian, and condition three was created from the responses of the participants who received the photo of an unknown college swimmer. Below (Table 1), the mean scores and standard deviations for each condition with each variable are shown.

## Hypotheses

Hypothesis one states that there will be a positive correlation between the identification the consumer has with the famous Olympian and the perceived credibility of the Olympian athlete.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Three Conditions and Variable

Variables	Condition 1	Condition 2	Condition 3
Intent to purchase	2.19 (1.64)	2.28 (1.62)	2.50 (1.74)
Celebrity Credibility	4.91 (.95)	5.09 (.82)	4.48 (.87)
Team Identification	2.41 (1.10)	2.67 (1.13)	1.89 (.99)
Sports Fan	3.24 (1.25)	2.97 (1.44)	3.16 (1.50)

NOTE: Standard deviations appear in parentheses next to the mean scores. Means scores for all items are based on a 7-point scale.

The results indicate that there is a positive correlation between the team identification (.50) and sports fans identification (.40) and the perceived credibility of the famous Olympian, supporting H1. Specifically, the higher the participants' level of fan and team identification, the more credible they perceived the Olympian to be.

Hypothesis two states that there will be a positive correlation between the identification the consumer has with the famous Olympian athlete and the intent to purchase the Olympian's endorsed item. There was no significant correlation found between these two variables. Hypothesis three states that there will be a positive correlation between the perceived credibility of the Olympian and the intent to purchase the Olympian's endorsed item; however, the correlation between the items was not significant. Thus, hypotheses two and three were not supported (see Tables 2, 3, and 4).

Table 2

Correlations for All Conditions

All Conditions	1	2	3	4
1. Celebrity Credibility		.		
2. Sports Fan	.35** (181)			
3. Team Identification	.39** (192)	.58** (176)		
4. Intent to Purchase	.08 (209)	.13* (199)	.14* (206)	

NOTE: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ . Number of participants appears in parentheses next to the correlation scores.

Table 3

Correlations for Condition One (Famous Olympian)

Condition 1	1	2	3	4
1. Celebrity Credibility		.		
2. Sports Fan	.40** (65)			
3. Team Identification	.50** (67)	.63** (64)		
4. Intent to Purchase	.19 (73)	.12 (70)	.05 (72)	

NOTE: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ . Number of participants appears in parentheses next to the correlation scores.

Hypothesis four states that there will be a positive correlation between the identification the consumer has with the Olympian team and the intent to purchase the Olympian athlete-endorsed item.

Table 4

## Correlations for Condition Two (U.S. Olympian)

Condition 2	1	2	3	4
1. Celebrity Credibility		.		
2. Sports Fan	.34** (57)			
3. Team Identification	.23* (67)	.78** (67)		
4. Intent to Purchase	.20 (70)	.15 (64)	.37** (72)	

NOTE: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ . Number of participants appears in parentheses next to the correlation scores.

The results indicate that in condition two, there was a significant correlation between team identification and intent to purchase (.37); however, for condition three, results revealed no significant relationships between other variables and intent to purchase (see Table 5).

Hypotheses five and six state that there will be differences in the level of participant identification and intent to purchase between the famous Olympic athlete, a lesser-known Olympic athlete, and an unknown college athlete. These were tested simultaneously using ANOVAs. The results reveal no significant differences between conditions for intent to purchase ( $F = .70$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .50$ ); however, the groups were different in terms of participant identification ( $F = 9.08$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p = .00$ ) (see Table 6 and 7).

Table 5

## Correlations for Condition Three (Unknown Athlete)

Condition 3	1	2	3	4
1. Celebrity Credibility		.		
2. Sports Fan	.38** (59)			
3. Team Identification	.20 (58)	.41** (53)		
4. Intent to Purchase	-.10 (66)	.11 (65)	.01 (62)	

NOTE: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ . Number of participants appears in parentheses next to the correlation scores.

An ANCOVA was also performed, with the image condition as the independent variable, with credibility and identification scores as covariates, and intent to purchase as the outcome variable. Results revealed that there were no significant differences between variables and intent to purchase (See table 8).

Table 6

## ANOVA Based on Advertising Condition Viewed

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Intent to Purchase	3.87	2	1.93	.70	.50
Celebrity Credibility	14.01	2	7.02	8.98	.00
Team Identification	21.09	2	10.54	9.08	.00
Sports Fan	2.60	2	1.30	.67	.51



Table 7

## Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons Means Differences

Variables	Conditions	Mean
Intent to purchase	1	-.09 (.95)
	2	
	1	-.31 (.52)
	3	
	2	
	3	-.22 (.71)
Celebrity Credibility	1	-.18 (.46)
	2	
	1	.43** (.01)
	3	
	2	
	3	.61** (.00)
Team Identification	1	-.26 (.36)
	2	
	1	.53* (.02)
	3	
	2	
	3	.79** (.00)
Sports Fan	1	.27 (.53)
	2	
	1	.07 (.95)
	3	
	2	
	3	-.12 (.72)

NOTE: \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; Standard Deviation scores are in parentheses

Table 8

ANCOVA of the Advertisement's Influence on Intent to Purchase Controlling for Credibility, "Fan," and Team Identification

	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	15.54	5	3.12	1.09	.37
Intercept	11.64	1	11.64	4.10	.05
Celebrity Credibility	.47	1	.47	.17	.69
Sports Fan	.38	1	.38	.13	.72
Team Identification	5.51	1	5.51	1.94	.17
Condition	1.60	2	.80	.28	.76
Error	454.49	160	2.84		
Total	1391.00	166			
Corrected Total	470.03	165			

### Summary

This chapter described the findings of the hypotheses proposed in chapter two. The results indicate that there is a positive correlation between the team identification and sports fans identification and the perceived credibility of the famous Olympian. However, there were no significant correlations between the identification or credibility with the famous Olympian athlete and intent to purchase. There was a significant correlation between team identification and intent to purchase with condition two, however, for condition three, results revealed no significant relationships. Finally, the results revealed no significant differences between groups in means for intent to purchase; however, the groups were different in terms of participant identification.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The previous chapter described the findings of the hypotheses proposed in chapter two. The results of the hypotheses suggest that there is a positive correlation between the identification the consumer has with the famous Olympian athlete and the perceived credibility of the Olympian athlete. Additionally, there is a positive correlation between the sports fan identification and the team identification when only looking at the famous Olympian. However, results showed that there was no significant correlation between the famous Olympian and the intent to purchase. When exploring the correlations between the identification to Olympic team and the intent to purchase, there were significant differences, specifically when comparing results to the unknown non-Olympic swimmer (condition three). Further, there were significant positive correlations regarding sports fan identification and celebrity credibility, and between the sports fan identification and team identification. Additional results indicated that when all three conditions were together, there was a significant correlation between team identification and intent to purchase, sports fan identification and intent to purchase, credibility and sports fan identification, credibility and team identification, and sports fan identification and team identification. Finally, when exploring the difference in levels of participant identification and the difference in intent to purchase between the three conditions, results indicated that the significant differences lay between groups one and three, and two and three,

when being compared to celebrity credibility and team identification. Specifically, participants identified more with the less famous Olympian athlete than either the famous athlete (Michael Phelps) or the unknown college athlete. However, there were no significant differences when it came to intent to purchase. This chapter will explain the meanings behind these results and provide further explanation for how these results can be interpreted.

### **Famous Olympian**

Results for the first hypothesis revealed that the higher the participants' level of fan and team identification, the more credible they perceived the Olympian to be. We do know from the statistics if credibility leads to identification, or vice versa. However, it is possible that when a famous individual is shown in an advertisement, their credibility can influence the consumer's attitude. According to social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), individuals are likely to model behavior that is being rewarded. Further, the more we identify with the model, the more likely we are to mimic their behavior. And even more specifically, when it comes to sports identification, individuals feel a powerful sense of connectedness to the team, athlete, or sport. Thus, if participants see an athlete who is deemed very credible, who is being rewarded, and who possesses quality characteristics, their identification might be strong if they are a sports fan, or even more, a fan of the United States in the Olympics. Additionally, this might also be because individuals typically like to compare themselves to other positive characteristics. One such theory that explains this concept is social comparison theory. Festinger (1954) developed this theory, which posits that individuals are motivated to evaluate their abilities and opinions, and one way to satisfy this need of self-evaluation is through the comparison to others

(Argo, White, & Dahl, 2006). Social comparison theory revolves around social identity, which explains that individuals need to feel as though they belong. Identities are developed through self-views and are developed through the various groups and roles one assumes (Takhar, Maclaran, Parsons, & Broderick, 2010). Therefore, when an advertisement shows an individual who is perceived as credible (through expertise, attractiveness and trustworthiness) viewers are likely to identify with those positive characteristics, and relate those positive features to themselves. On the other hand, when a non-credible spokesperson is used, their non-credible characteristics might have a negative effect on consumers, causing them to disassociate with the product. It is therefore important to consider credibility in terms of expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness when choosing spokespersons for product advertising campaigns. If individuals are comparing themselves to the spokesperson, the perceived credibility of the spokesperson might influence how much consumers identify with the spokesperson and in turn, how much the consumer identifies with the advertisement.

Hypotheses two and three relate to the correlation between identification and credibility, and intent to purchase. Neither of the hypotheses was supported, demonstrating that even the use of an image of a famous and decorated Olympian athlete, who was perceived as credible and with whom people identified, did not lead to the purchasing of an item. However, this still provides meaningful insight about the usefulness, or lack thereof, of a celebrity endorser. Previous literature indicates that under specific conditions, the use of a celebrity endorser can lead to intent to purchase. Such conditions also related to ELM and whether the information is centrally versus peripherally processed. Specifically, product relevance or product fit (Koernig & Boyd,

2009), attractiveness when relating to the promoted product (Trampe, Stapel, Siero & Mulder, 2010), and expertise relating to the promoted product (Ohanian, 1991) are variables that increase intent to purchase and its positive relation to the use of celebrity endorsers. In each of these studies, however, the variables relate to central route processing. Perhaps individuals who process at the peripheral level can still deem sponsors to be identifiable and credible; however, maybe for the consumers to intend to purchase the item, a central route must be taken. It can also be noted that perhaps the use of more participants would reveal a positive correlation between credibility and intent to purchase. When all conditions were tested together, both sports fan identification and team identification influenced intent to purchase. This show that with a greater number of participants, statistical power increases, and perhaps the level of the correlation would have been more powerful if each condition had more participants.

### **American Olympic Team**

Hypothesis four states that there is a positive correlation between the identification with the Olympic team and the intent to purchase. All three conditions were examined when analyzing the results. Condition one included the photo of Michael Phelps, while condition two included a photo of the non-famous Olympian swimmer, Matt Grevers. Both athletes are part of the American Olympic team; however, only condition two, pertaining to the lesser-known American Olympic swimmer revealed a strong correlation between identification and intent to purchase. Additionally, the third condition, which included a photo of an unknown college swimmer, David Nolan, revealed no significance pertaining to intent to purchase. This indicates that consumers are more likely to purchase an item endorsed from a random American Olympian than a

famous Olympian athlete. However, the ANCOVA revealed no significant differences, so we must accept the correlational evidence with skepticism.

When considering the lesser-known American athlete, there is a very strong correlation between the team identification and the intent to purchase. This might relate back to the ideas pertaining to the American ideologies, patriotism, heroism, and the extreme cultural popularity that comes with the Olympic Games. Earlier it was mentioned that the Patriotism that becomes evident during the time of the Olympics is exceptional, and often individuals become much more passionate about these sporting events (as opposed to nationwide events) because the Games can also be interpreted as a demonstration of world power and dominance (Abelson, 2010). Further, the athletes' heroism becomes recognized as an inspirational motivation (Hoebeke, Deprez, & Raeymaeckers, 2011). When Grevers is seen as an Olympian, and therefore, a powerful, skilled, and accomplished individual, individuals may be more likely to identify with him. He is being rewarded for his skills in the form of advertisements, fame, and by just being an Olympian. Once more, because he is less-known, there are no prior prejudices against him, making him as untainted and pure as possible. However, his status is still recognized within the photo that was given to the participants. This condition was the only one that impacted the participants to suggest that they would purchase the item being promoted. And this is most likely due to the perceived rewards he has gained, his pure Olympian status, and the participants' identification to his American nationality, therefore causing a desire to purchase an item endorsed by him.

On the other hand, perhaps it was Michael Phelps' prior scandal relating to drugs that tainted his reputation, causing a lack of correlation between identification and intent

to purchase (Van Valkenburg & Fuller, 2009). Even if he is perceived as credible, because he is the most-decorated Olympian of all time, that alone did not transcend to purchasing the item. His status might have been recognized and comparable to any other famous athletes' status because he is the sponsor for so many brands. In other words, his affiliation with so many brands might have diluted his persuasive power as a celebrity endorser. Just as other nationally recognized famous athletes are sponsors for many products, Phelps may now be grouped with those athletes, losing his Olympic purity.

Finally, there was also no correlation relating to identification and intent to purchase when participants received the photo of the unknown college swimmer. Because this photo was used as a control, this is to be expected. There is not much reason participants might feel a connection or feel the need to identify with the unknown college swimmer, other than if they are also athletes, they are college students, or they perceived him to be a credible source. Therefore, it was anticipated that participants would not feel any identification, and therefore, not feel any desire to purchase the endorsed item.

This information becomes pertinent because advertisers can seek less-known Olympian athletes as opposed to famous Olympian athletes to increase consumers' intent to purchase. If we accept only the correlational evidence, and not the ANCOVA findings, it may be that advertisers can use athletes' patriotism, credibility (through expertise, attractiveness, and trustworthiness), and purity, to their advantage, understanding that famous athletes sometimes come at a higher cost and greater risk. The lesser-known Olympians' transparency, dedication to the sport, and desire to bring the United States to the top makes these athletes better endorsers for product advertising, as well as being more cost effective. Further, the results also indicated that when looking at the lesser-



known Olympian, there was a significant positive correlation in relation to sports fan identification and celebrity credibility, and sports fan identification and team identification. This relates to hypothesis one. Although it was not hypothesized for the lesser-known Olympian, the results indicate similar findings in that higher the participants' level of fan and team identification, the more credible they perceived the lesser-known Olympian to be. This may be due to similar reasons relating to social cognitive theory and identification, and social comparison theory. Individuals compare themselves to positive characteristics that they can relate to, and a lesser-known Olympian can be very relatable due to the patriotism that was also specified.

### **Condition Differences**

Hypothesis five supported that there are differences in level of participant identification between the three conditions. Specifically, the differences in identification lay between condition one and condition three, and between condition two and condition three. This shows that participants identified more with the Olympian athletes than the unknown college swimmer. When comparing the identification levels of Michael Phelps to the unknown college athlete, results show that participants feel a stronger identification with Phelps. Participants might feel a connection to him because he has been a sponsor for many products (Mullen, 2012), and is well known for his abundance of accomplishments in swimming and Olympic events. Once again, because his accomplishments and fame can be seen as a reward and he possesses characteristics that lead him to be perceived as credible (expertise, attractiveness, trustworthiness), participants may feel a connection to him as a fan; or they might feel such a connection just because he is generally viewed so positively. As described earlier, individuals like to

compare themselves to positive characteristics seen in others, as demonstrated with social comparison theory (Argo, White, & Dahl, 2006; Festinger, 1954). It may be that individuals identified with Phelps for the same reasons that they found him to be a credible source.

When the United States Olympian was compared to the unknown college athlete, it was the Olympian that participants identified with more. Once again, participants identified more with the Olympian than the unknown swimmer. In this case however, it might not have just been his fame (like Michael Phelps), but his American status. Perhaps participants felt a connection to this athlete because he was presented as a United States Olympian. His American status may have made him more identifiable than Phelps and the unknown athlete because he is not famous enough to be recognized in his own right (like Phelps), but has the title of Olympian. Participants might have identified with his patriotism, his passion to bring home a gold medal for the United States, or even the heroism and Horatio Alger ideologies that are present in many Olympian athletes today (Sarachek, 1978). It is important that this difference in identification was present between the three conditions because it shows that participants do identify more with the Olympians than an unknown athlete. This identification can lead an individual to focus more on the advertisement and perhaps bring them in for a more central route of persuasion.

Hypothesis six found that there was no difference in intent to purchase between the three conditions. Even though there was a difference in how much individuals identified with the athletes, controlling for this and for fanship and credibility did not help the advertisement condition to influence whether they were willing to buy the item.

This may be because college students were sampled, and the item being promoted was a Visa credit card, which may be the cause of the low motivation to purchase. Many students may not have the credit or the means to purchase a Visa credit card, or may not feel they need to purchase such a credit card at this point in their lives. Using a different item may have increased intent to purchase responses, or using a different audience where age and finances were considered might have increased intent to purchase responses as well.

### **Limitations**

Although this study provided an understanding of Olympian athletes and sponsors in advertising campaigns, limitations regarding the participant population, demographic information and size did exist. As mentioned, the item being endorsed could be the cause for the low intent to purchase responses, due to the age of the participants sampled. Further, the researcher neglected to ask the participants' nationality, which would have been beneficial to run as a covariate for the ANCOVA. Further, although the total number of participants seems sufficient, the total number per condition group could have been increased to create a greater total power within each condition.

Additionally, although Michael Phelps is the most decorated Olympian of all time, he has had some scandals in his past relating to drug-use (Van Valkenburg, & Fuller, 2009). This might have influenced how much individuals identify with him, how credible individuals think he is, and how much they might be influenced to purchase an item endorsed by him. He is one of the most recognized Olympians of this time and his fame for this study was desired; however, his background with drug-use could have altered the results. Further, this study was being conducted under the assumption that fans

identify with the nation through the athlete, when perhaps fans identify with the athlete, and then feel pride for their country. Perhaps one possibility is that the identification one has for the athlete and nation are not mutually exclusive, and should not have been treated separately. These two forms of identification should be explored together further in future research.

Finally, because participants were only exposed to the advertisement one time before the questions began, and they did not have a chance to revisit the advertisement, and because this was the only time they saw this specific advertisement (because it was manipulated by the researcher) the intent to purchase responses might be expected to be low. Usually advertisements appear many times in commercials/print; however, these participants only saw this advertisement once. Therefore, if the participants were to have been exposed to this advertisement many times over the course of the Olympic Games, perhaps participants would have had a stronger connection and had more intent to purchase the Visa card. This study did take place during the Winter Olympic Games; however, the Summer Games are much more popular in terms of viewership. The 2012 London Olympics averaged 31.1 million American viewers (“London Olympics 2012 ratings”, 2012) while 2014 the Sochi Olympics averaged only 21.4 million American viewers (Rayman, 2014). Further, this study was focused around a Summer Game’s event. Moreover, the United States was losing many events to Russia during the time the survey went out, which may have lowered total team identification.

### **Future Research and Practical Implications**

There are many areas in which this research can be expanded on in the future. First, social cognitive theory can be expanded further relating to the ideas of

identification. Examining how identification can be used as a persuasive strategy within advertising can be very effective for campaign advertisements. The theory has been used and researched many times when looking at inhibitory or disinhibitory effects (Paek, Reid, Choi, & Jeong, 2010), and with self-efficacy (Peng, 2008); however, identification relating to these concepts has not been examined to its fullest potential. It would be beneficial to conduct more research on how identification can increase modeling behaviors to increase sales or awareness. This study demonstrated that individuals strongly identify with well-known Olympians and lesser-known Olympians, as opposed to unknown athletes. Conducting further research to see how companies can use this to their advantage may benefit companies in terms of costs and sales.

Second, the Olympic Games' advertising strategies can be studied further. Using lesser-known Olympians gave strong results to identification, credibility and intent to purchase. Using lesser-known Olympians in future campaigns might benefit companies because these athletes will not cost as much to hire, will have a clean slate, and will promote the American Dream ideology. It may be interesting to look into the strategies that are used for the Olympic Games, not in terms of viewership which have been studied in depth in the past, but in terms of the advertising involved with the Games to seek more insightful results.

Finally, more research should be conducted on what leads consumers to purchase endorsed items. It seems that using the central route to persuasion in regards to ELM has been more successful in past research, so examining how identification can be used as a means to lead audiences to take a more centralized route can offer new results. Further, more research relating social cognitive theory and intent to purchase can be conducted to

see if self-efficacy or the acknowledgement of rewards and punishments can lead to the purchasing of an item.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This thesis has reviewed the previous literature that was relevant for this study, focusing first on the Olympic Games, second on advertising and finally concluding with social cognitive theory. The Olympics section focused on all aspects of the Games including the organization, and the research that has been done pertaining to media and the Olympics. Advertising was then addressed, where the use of endorsement roles and celebrities in advertising was discussed. This section concentrated on athletes as sponsors, and reviewed previous research where national athletes have been used as persuasive techniques to increase intent to purchase with consumers. The review of literature concluded with a section discussing social cognitive theory, and its role with identification. Specifically, it looked at the identification an individual can have an athlete, sport or team. It then proposed relationships between the primary components being studied—exposure to media images, the consumer's identification with the athletes, the athletes' credibility, and the consumer's intent to purchase. Due to these hypotheses, the researcher chose to conduct an experiment in which participants' received one of three photos of a famous Olympian, a lesser-known Olympian, or an unknown college swimmer, and were asked to answer survey questions pertaining to the photo they received.

Results indicated that there were positive correlations between the fan and team identification the consumer has with the famous Olympian athlete and the perceived credibility of the Olympian athlete. And, there was a positive correlation between the

sports fan identification and the team identification when only looking at the famous Olympian. This indicates that the higher the participants' level of fan and team identification, the most credible they perceive the Olympian to be. Thus, if participants see an Olympian who is deemed credible and being rewarded, they may identify with the Olympian more, causing a stronger connection to the advertisement and therefore the product. Although there was a connection in terms of identification with the famous Olympian, there was no correlation with intent to purchase. However, participants seeing an advertisement featuring the lesser-known Olympian revealed a strong correlation between identification and intent to purchase. This was explained with the ideas pertaining to the American ideologies, patriotism, heroism, and the extreme cultural popularity that comes with the Olympic Games and the American athlete. Phelps had a drug scandal that might have tainted his reputation; however, the lesser-known Olympian was pure and no negative stories had spoiled his image. Finally, it was shown that participants identified more with the famous Olympian than the unknown athlete, and the lesser-known Olympian than the unknown athlete. Again this was explained by Phelps' fame and by the lesser-known athlete's attributed patriotism. There was no significance found relating to intent to purchase, which may be because the item being endorsed was a Visa credit card, and college students may have no need or means for a Visa credit card at this time in their lives. The findings revealed that individuals identify well the Olympians, and that lesser-known Olympians may make for better sponsors due to their untainted image and their strong credibility. These athletes will cost less and provide strong identification with consumers. Researchers should continue to explore this subject and should conduct more research pertaining to identification in the future.

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